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ABSTRACT

Based on a review of relevant literature, a report was prepared which examines the impact of viewing violence on television on the social behavior of the viewer. An introduction discusses a definition of violence and proposes reasons why violence may appeal to viewers. The remainder of the text examines three major research questions: (1) the effects of television violence; (2) viewing patterns of children; and (3) the content of television programs. (EMH)

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NORTH YORK BOARD OF EDUCATION

RESEARCH REPORT

THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION ON CHILDREN: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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IR003 941

January, 1976

Background

On May 7, 1975, Premier William Davis appointed a Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry, charged with the following responsibilities:

" 1. to study the effects on society of the increasing exhibition of violence in the communications industry;

2. to determine if there is any connection or a cause and effect relationship between this phenomenon and the incidence of violent crime in society;

3. to hold public hearings to enable groups and organizations, individual citizens and representatives of the industry to make known their views on the subject;

4. to make appropriate recommendations, if warranted, on any measures that should be taken by the Government of Ontario by other levels of Government, by the general public and by the industry."

(Order in Council, May 7, 1975).

A motion by Trustee F. Chapkin regarding North York participation was referred to staff for consideration. At the meeting of the Board on December 15, 1975, the following motion was passed:

" In the interest of improving the scientific validity of educational opinion and providing a base of information for observations of the relationship between students' experience of media violence and student behaviour, and in order to:

1. Prepare a report regarding the effects of violence in the communications industry on students for presentation at the Public Hearing to be held by the Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry on 13 May 1975;

2. Provide staff members with background information relating to this subject; ....

the Management and Academic Program Committee RECOMMENDS that:

a) the Director of Education conduct a survey of staff and student opinion regarding the effects of violence in the communications industry, on students;

b) the Department of Research and Development undertake a review and distribution of literature on the subject; ..."

This review of literature was prepared in keeping with the above motion.

INTRODUCTION

> " It is impossible to prove that man is becoming more violent or that we live in a more violent world today than that experienced by our ancestors. It is probably true, however, that this generation believes that never has there been so much violence and, indeed, that we are experiencing a rising tide of antisocial violence in modern life. Moreover, since the onset of the mass media it is certainly true that more people witness portrayals of real and fantasy violence more frequently than ever before in human history. "
>
> (Larsen, 1968, p. 3)

During the last twenty to twenty-five years, many people have grown to depend on television for much of their evening and week-end pleasure. Young children, for example, are estimated to watch television for more than 2000 hours before they start school! Much has been written about television. Some authors have emphasized its educational values and potentialities. Others have expressed concern regarding the inferior quality of programs. A large portion of the literature on television has been concerned with the effects of violence.

What is violence?

Typically, in the research to be discussed in later sections of this report, violence has been defined in a manner similar to the following:

> " Violence is the overt expression of physical force, compelling action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually hurting or killing."
>
> (Gerbner & Gross (1973)

Since 1969, Gerbner and his associates have produced an annual report in which they provide a composite index of violence (as defined above) on prime-time network television. During a specified week in October, which it had been determined was representative of programming at other times during the year, teams of trained observers recorded the number of violent episodes. One of their findings was that the most violent programs were those designed exclusively for children - cartoons. The following is an excerpt from one of Gerbner's reports:

> " The average cartoon hour in 1967 contained more than three times as many violent episodes as the average adult dramatic hour. The trend toward

> shorter plays sandwiched between frequent commercials on fast-moving cartoon programs further increased the saturation. By 1969, with a violent episode at least every two minutes in all Saturday morning cartoon programming (including the least violent and including commercial time), and with adult drama becoming less saturated with violence, the average cartoon hour had nearly six times the violence rate of the average adult television drama hour, and nearly 12 times the violence rate of the average movie hour."
>
> (Gerbner, 1972 as reported in Liebert et al., 1973).

This sort of defintion of violence and so these kinds of findings,have been popular in the literature and the press. There are those, however, who feel that it is too narrow and thus too restrictive. For example, Dr. Fred Rainsberry, faculty member at O.I.S.E. and Chairman of the Children's Committee Canadian Broadcasting League, advocates a much broader and perhaps more philosophical definition of violence:

> " I would consider violence to be an assault on a person's rights or property by another individual or group of individuals. Violence usually entails an abuse of power."

Within this definition Rainsberry includes not only physical violence, but

- psychological violence, i.e. "where one seeks to tyrannize the will of another person"
- political violence, e.g. "the manipulation of government to ensure the power of one group to dominate another group"
- competition, which has the potential of violence. Although we may like to think of ourselves as co-operative, social and benevolent individuals, we also want the fruits of competition as well!

In this same vein, Halloran (1964) points out further difficulties inherent in definitions of violence - i.e., the perceptions of the viewer. To begin with, often the world does not appear to children as it does to adults, therefore, adults may not see the same thing in a television program as children do. Even within a group of children (or adults for that matter), there may be a variety of responses to the same stimulus. For example, some may be frightened, others amused and still others totally unimpressed. Halloran is suggesting, therefore, that definitions of violence should not be limited solely to acts of physical violence, but should include the viewers' perceptions of what constitutes violence.

In light of these few brief comments, we can see that the question - What is violence? does not necessarily have a simple answer.

A second question which should also be given some consideration is -

Why does violence have such wide appeal?

This is a question which is being asked more and more frequently. Although, as with the first question, there are no definitive answers, several hypotheses have been postulated, two of which will be discussed here, briefly, to provide the reader with a "flavour" of some of the issues.

Violence as a theme is not unique to television. It has, for example, been a common theme in literature from fairy tales to Shakespeare. According to Rainsberry (1975), "in every instance of violence in Shakespeare or other great literature, violence is "distanced" and perceived objectively as part of the human drama. Violence is an element in the aesthetic structure of the plays and is not presented for purely sensational purposes". In an analysis of violence in American literature, Davis (1966) points out that "American literature has shown a peculiar fascination with homicidal violence". Although he feels that "it would be naive to conclude that the frequency of fighting and killing in American fiction is proof of an unusually violent society" (after all as pointed out above, violence has not been an uncommon theme in literature in general); however, he does feel that "there can be no doubt that the treatment of violence in American literature reflects certain historical conditions and circumstances." In this same vein, in an article entitled "Violence as an American Value Theme", Gerson (1968) puts forward the hypothesis that violence is a part of the American social and cultural structure. It is worth noting, perhaps, that when people complain about violence on television, they rarely mention news programs with their on-location films of riots, including looting and vandalism; war, with day by day coverage of the events in Vietnam and Northern Ireland and more recently in Lebanon; hijacking of air planes; kidnaping of both political figures as well as private citizens; fights between police and strikers on picket lines, etc. There is the suggestion, therefore, that historically, as well as currently, violence has played a role in American society as a means of resolving conflict.

Let us approach the question from another slightly different perspective. According to Fromm (1968), animals typically react with aggressiveness when basic aspects of their existence, such as their life or territory, are threatened. Such threats constitute a "clear and present danger". Man shows similar aggressive responses to threats against vital interest, although his responses are far more complex. Man is a "symbol-making animal" and symbols or concepts such as self perception, God, Country - can take on as much importance as life or food. Therefore, when values important to man's mental equilibrium are threatened - he too can react aggressively.

Glasser (1972) feels that television has played a role in the development of some of our concepts and beliefs about our life styles. He refers to our society as the "identity society". "Television tells people that they should be dissatisfied with the status quo, that they can

experience more in life than they presently do, that they should be aware of the unlimited possiblities of their own humanity, and, finally that they can best achieve their own human potential by using the products advertised or by living like (i.e. identifying with) the people shown in programs ... Children who watch a great deal of television and know nothing other than the identity society, get constant reinforcement that they are important, that they are valuable and that they should lead the good life." According to Rainsberry (1975), and in keeping with Fromm's hypothesis, this syndrome of belief in the best of all possible worlds seems to be at the root of much violence. When our notion of the good world is challenged, our security is threatened, and we strike out to defend its reality. Rainsberry feels, therefore, that our fascination with violence stems from the satisfaction derived in seeing a simplistic use of power used to guarantee the rights we cherish for ourselves.

As with the first question raised, the second question - why does violence have such wide appeal? - does not have simple answers. They are questions which both broadcasters and researchers are beginning to feel should be considered more seriously. They have been raised here in the hopes that the reader will for the moment suspend his judgment and view the problems and issues to be discussed in later sections with a somewhat broader perspective. We would also warn the reader before we begin that there is a lack of consensus among researchers regarding the effects of TV violence and so in some instances, conflicting results.

Although there is a tendency to think that concern with violence in the mass media is a relatively recent issue, this is not the case. As early as the 1930's there was a series of studies on motion pictures and Charters (1935) in summing up the findings of these studies said "To say that movies are solely responsible for anti-social conduct, delinquency, or crime is not valid."

In 1955, Dallas H. Smythe wrote "PTA groups across the land are heard protesting the number of murders and related violence in TV programs. A Senate Committee stages hearings on the effects of comic books (and also TV and radio) on juvenile delinquency - Educational foundations conduct conferences and surveys to guide them in doing something - they aren't yet sure what - about the relation of violence in the mass media to the development of character in children". Smythe felt that the concern with violence was many-faceted and organized his analysis of the problem around a series of questions. For example,

- Can it be proved today that <u>particular</u> TV programs or comic books are prime causes of juvenile delinquency?

- Can it be proved that the violence in mass media content provides an individually designed safety valve through which to work off aggressions in fantasy?

- Can it be true that TV crime programs and crime comics are being made scapegoats?

- Is the sheer mass of the violence in the mass media bad for children?

- Is censorship the answer to the problems whether they be identified as "violence" or whatever in the mass media?

In concluding his article, Smythe noted that at that time, i.e., 1955, little research had been done with regard to the questions posed and so not much was known about the effect of mass media content on children. A rather sad commentary, in his opinion, in view of the amount of concern expressed.

In the twenty years since Smythe's article, however, a great deal of research has been carried out in this area. In recent years, much of this research was stimulated through funds made available through the U.S. Surgeon-General's office of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. In 1969, 12 behavioural scientists were appointed to a committee and given the task of preparing a report on an examination of research on televised violence and its impact on social behaviour. A large program of research with a budget of one million dollars was initiated to provide the needed evidence. After assessing the findings of its own research program and other research in the field in 1972, the committee reached the following carefully worded conclusion:

> there is "a preliminary and tentative indication of a causal relation between viewing violence on television and aggressive behavior; an indication that any such causal relation operates only on some children... and an indication that it operates only in some environmental contexts."

In a recent article in the Harvard Educational Review, Leifer, Gordon and Graves (1974) state "There is now sufficient research to suggest that viewing televised aggression contributes to aggressive behaviour in children and adolescents". In an earlier, although unpublished paper, Wilbur Schramm came to a similar conclusion, "There is evidence that violence in motion pictures can contribute to violence, delinquency and crime in real life." However, such complex behaviours have multiple roots "in the personality of the child, his family life, his school and peer group experience, the values, opportunities and inhibitions he absorbs from being set down in the world where he is, and ... among other things... the mass media". (Schramm 1968, p. 2). When we speak of media violence, therefore, we are speaking of a contributory effect rather than a sole or chief cause. This in no way, however, reduces the seriousness of the problem of violence on television. There is good reason to examine carefully the evidence available concerning the nature, strength, sources and conditions of this effect.

The remainder of this paper is organized into three major sections:

I An examination of research relevant to hypotheses people hold about the effects of TV violence, i.e.,
- TV violence increases aggression
- TV violence decreases aggression
- the effects of TV violence depend upon the individual.

II An examination of survey research - particularly related to patterns of watching.

III TV programming - an examination of the content of TV programs, who controls it and a possible role for parents and teachers.

I Hypotheses Related to the Effects of TV Violence

Children learn a great deal from television, even though entertainment rather than instruction is usually their main reason for watching. Some research concerning television's effects on children focuses on observational learning, or the way in which the behaviour of children changes as a result of exposure to the actions and values of others. Much of the research in this area supports the hypothesis that viewing televised aggression leads to increased aggressiveness in children.

On the other hand, a number of studies have been conducted to explore what is referred to as the "catharsis" hypothesis, i.e. viewing violence or aggression might reduce the level of aggression in the viewer. If an individual can express some of his aggression, in other words "he lets off steam", he can reduce the pressure to behave aggressively. If it could be proved that the same result occurs vicariously by watching televised violence, then our ideas about the effect of violence in the media might have to be considerably revised.

Other research suggests that the question "Does television stimulate aggressive behaviour?" is far too simplistic and that the influence of television is dependent upon a host of variables, e.g. home, peer relationships.

This section will examine the research related to each of these positions.

(a) Hypothesis I: Will children acquire as part of their behaviour the aggressive acts they view on television?

In experimental studies of young children's imitative aggression, exposure to aggressive models, whether live or in film, led consistently to high levels of aggressive behaviour. For example, in a study by Bandura, Ross

& Ross ,1961) one group of children observed an aggressive scene in which an adult physically attacked a large plastic doll, while a second group of children watched the adult play non-aggressively with the doll. After this experience, the children were put into a room with the same toys they had seen in the demonstration. The children who had seen the adult beating up the doll, imitated him; while the ones who had seen the non-aggressive behaviour were much less likely to hit the doll, and played less aggressively generally. The children who had seen the aggressive film were more likely than others to select a toy gun to play with from among the available toys, even though no guns had appeared in the film. Thus the aggressive effects of the film were not confined to direct imitation, but also aroused aggressive acts that the child had previously learned to perform. Another disturbing result of this experiment was that most of the children said they disapproved of the aggression they saw on the screen, and yet copied it. Obviously, sometimes it takes more than knowledge of social sanctions to control the expression of what has been learned.

A study by Bandura and Huston (1961) tried to find out whether children were more likely to imitate a model they liked. They put two groups of preschool children through contrasting experiences with the same model, in one of which he behaved aggressively, in the other not. Children imitated the model more closely if they had previously had rewarding experiences with him. However, the part of the models' behavior that was aggressive was readily imitated regardless of the relation of the children to the model. The implication is that the tendency of children to imitate violence is very strong, and that, while other classes of behaviour may not be imitated from a film because the child has no real-life relationship with the model, aggression will be, because it does not require such a relationship.

In a more recent study (Leifer & Roberts, 1972), four groups of preschoolers were compared: one saw an aggressive program and then played alone with toys; another saw a non-aggressive program and played with the same toys; a third saw the aggressive program and predicted how they themselves would resolve interpersonal conflict; and the fourth saw the non-aggressive program and predicted how they would resolve conflict. The programs were videotapes of twelve-year-old boys who either displayed aggression against toys and each other or played constructively with the toys and each other. Children who saw aggression were much more likely than the other children to commit aggression themselves, such as hitting an inflated clown, throwing a ball at a woman in the room with them and shooting a dart gun. They were also more likely to say they would use aggression to resolve interpersonal conflicts.

Steuer, Applefield and Smith (1971)conducted an experiment to investigate whether children's interpersonal aggressive behaviour would increase

subsequent to viewing filmed aggression. The subjects were two groups of five preschool children; one group watched aggressive TV programs and the other group watched non-aggressive programs. Both groups were involved for a total of approximately 110 minutes over a period of eleven days. Interpersonal aggressive behaviour immediately following viewing was recorded and compared with the same type of behaviour recorded during a prior 10-day baseline period. Results revealed that children who viewed aggressive TV programs showed significantly greater increases in interpersonal aggression than children who viewed non-aggressive programs.

Liebert and Baron (1972) also investigated the hypothesis that exposure to televised violence would increase the willingness of children to hurt another child. Boys and girls of two age groups (5-6 and 8-9 years) first viewed excerpts from actual television programs depicting either aggressive or non-aggressive scenes, and then were provided with an opportunity to aggress against a peer. Subsequently, all subjects were placed in a free play situation and the frequency of their aggressive responses observed. Results indicated that children exposed to the aggressive program engaged in longer attacks against an ostensible child victim than subjects exposed to the non-aggressive program. The aggressive program also elicited a higher level of play than the non-aggressive one, particularly among the younger boys.

What is the duration of these effects?

Most studies have measured behaviour immediately following exposure to aggression. Hicks (1965) conducted a study in which children were returned to the test situation six months after exposure. The children did show retention of imitative aggression when they returned. However, this retention may have been due to the fact that the stimulus situation was a unique one in which the child's only previous experience was the earlier modeling and play. Durable effects might be found if the TV exposure triggered some initial increase in aggression or prosocial behaviour which was then maintained by environmental reinforcements. Without some support, however, such behavioural dispositions would probably be extinguished.

Lefkowitz, Eron, Walder, and Huesmann(1972) investigated the long-term effects of television violence viewing and aggressive behaviour. Eron determined the amount of violence viewing and aggression of 875 youngsters when they were in grade three. He measured aggression by peer ratings - each child rated every other child in the class on a variety of physical and verbal aggressive behaviours. The aggression score for each child was determined by the number of peers who said he was aggressive. The measurement

of TV violence viewing was obtained in an interview with each child's mother. Eron found that the boys who watched a great many violent programs were more likely to be rated high in aggressive behaviour by their peers. However, this relationship did not hold for girls.

Ten years later, when the original participants were 19, Lefkowitz and his associates obtained information about violence viewing and aggression for 460 of the original 875 subjects. The measurement of aggression was again collected through peer ratings. Although the data collected for girls did not reveal any significant differences, for boys, a positive and significant relationship existed between TV violence viewing in the third grade and aggressive behaviour 10 years later. The relationship between aggressive behaviour in the third grade and violence viewing when the boys were 19 was not significant.

According to Lefkowitz, et. al., their findings suggest that TV violence viewing is positively related to aggressive behaviour with long term effects: boys watching TV violence when they were nine were more likely to be rated as aggressive and were still rated as aggressive ten years later.

(b) Hypothesis II: Does viewing television violence lead to a reduction in aggressive behaviour?

A number of experiments have been done to explore the idea that exposure to film or television violence might, under some circumstances, actually reduce the level of aggression in viewers.

Feshbach has given the most effort to this line of study. In 1955, he demonstrated that an adult who had been angered before the experiment would lower his aggression scores if given a chance to express his feelings in fantasy behaviour. Although the effects were not large, they did raise the question of whether merely observing fantasy, rather than producing it, would have a cathartic effect on aggression; i.e. viewing an act of aggression committed by another person might reduce the strength of the aggressive drive within the viewer.
A similar kind of experiment with children (Feshbach, 1956) however, did not replicate the results obtained with the adult sample.

In 1961, Feshbach conducted another experiment with an adult sample of male, college students. The subjects were divided into two groups: an "insult" condition in which unwarranted derogatory remarks were made by the experimenter towards the subject; and the control group in which the subjects were treated in a neutral standard manner. Half of each group saw an

aggressive fight film; the other half saw a neutral film. Following the films all subjects were administered a modified word association list sensitive to the arousal of aggression, and a questionnaire about their attitudes toward the experimenter. He found that those subjects who had been previously angered expressed less aggression after watching the prize fight film than those who had seen the neutral film. The subjects who had not been angered, however, showed the opposite trend; they became more aggressive after seeing the prize fight film than after seeing the neutral film. The implication of this study was that for subjects who had had their aggression raised immediately before seeing an aggressive film, the vicarious experience may reduce aggression.

In still another study, reported in 1971, Feshbach and Singer tested the catharsis hypothesis in a very realistic setting. They studied 665 boys, 10 to 17 years old, in seven institutions -- three private schools, including one military school, and four children's homes. The subjects were randomly assigned to one of two television "diets". One of these contained a high proportion of aggressive programs; the other contained almost no aggressive programs. Each boy was required to watch at least six hours of television each week, and more than this if they wished but all their viewing had to be from their own "diet". Paper-and-pencil measures of hostility were obtained before and after the experiment, and cottage supervisors rated the behaviour of each boy daily. The result of this experiment was that in the children's homes, though not in the private schools, the cottage supervisors found aggressive behavior more frequent among the boys who saw non-aggressive programs than among those who had the aggressive "diet". This same effect appeared in all the age groups that were tested, and was greatest among boys who had initially been above the average on questionnaire measures of hostility.

While the findings of this study appear to provide support for the catharsis hypothesis, the study has been subjected to a number of criticisms. For example, Chaffee & McLeod (1971) showed that boys in the non-aggressive TV group liked their assigned programs significantly less than boys in the aggressive TV group. Thus a possible alternative explanation for the fact that some control boys were more aggressive is that they resented being restricted to non-aggressive programs and this resentment was expressed in an increase in aggression.

Other researchers have attempted to find validity in the catharsis hypothesis but have not had much success; for example, the work of Berkowitz and his associates.

Berkowitz & Rawlings (1963) conducted an experiment in which they provoked and angered an experimental group of subjects, then showed them a film of a prize fighter being beaten in the ring. They told half of the subjects that the victim of the beating was a "downright coundrel" to determine whether justifying the aggression would help the subjects to rid themselves vicariously of their own aggression. In neither group was there any decrease in aggression and justifying the violence actually increased the aggressive feelings of those who saw the film!

Berkowitz, Corwin and Heironomous (1963) replicated this experiment including a control group who saw a non-aggressive film. The results were as before: the subjects who expressed the strongest hostility (in a test of attitudes) against the researcher who had angered them, were those who had seen the justified aggression; those who expressed the least hostility were those who had seen the non-aggressive film. Again suggesting that observing aggressive behaviour may increase the aggressive responses of the viewer, as opposed to decreasing them as postulated by the catharsis hypothesis. These findings, say the authors, "offer little comfort for those who contend that fantasy aggression necessarily has socially beneficial effects. Rather than providing an easy and safe outlet for the pent-up hostility within the angered members of the media audience, filmed violence may well increase the probability that someone in the audience will behave aggressively in a later situation ... Should the fantasy aggression appear socially justified.. they may become likely to believe it is permissible to attack the "villains" in their own lives, at least during the time immediately following the film". (Berkowitz et al., p. 229).

(c) Hypothesis III: What other factors influence a child's acceptance of aggressive behaviour he has observed on television?

Whether or not a child will reproduce the behaviour he has observed also depends on variables other than the content of the program.

Meyer (1973) maintains that the question of whether violence depicted on TV causes viewers to act aggressively is meaningless, because it implies a simple "yes" or "no" response. Television violence can affect the behaviour of children on some occasions, but these effects depend on the types of viewers and program content as well as the conditions under which the program is viewed.

Friedrich and Stein (1973) investigated the effects of exposure to aggressive

television programs on the naturalistic social behaviour of preschoolers and found that the children who viewed the programs showed a decline in tolerance of delay and rule obedience. For the children initially high in aggression, the programming increased their interpersonal aggression, while there was no effect on children initially low in aggression. Thus the viewing of televised aggression increased the aggressive behaviour of children who were predisposed to aggressive feelings and behaviour.

Consequences portrayed for an aggressive act and the extent to which the act is approved are also critical factors in determining the influence of witnessing or vicariously participating in the act. If the aggressive activity is successful and meets social approval, one may expect that implicit aggressive responses on the part of the audience will be reinforced and the value placed on the aggression will be shifted in a positive direction.

Ralph Garry (1966) suggests that direct effects of viewing TV violence are most likely to occur with children who are experiencing emotional disturbances, with children having unsatisfactory relationships with their parents or with their agemates, and with children who are insecure, isolated, or fearful. The greater the parent-child conflict, the greater the seclusion to viewing TV. Children with unsatisfactory social relations will retain the content longer and day dream about it more.

In an overview of a large body of research, Liebert (1972) concluded that at least under some circumstances, exposure to televised aggression can lead children to accept what they have seen as a partial guide to their own actions. However, this acceptance is complex, subtle, and dependent on such factors as: rewards to the model, whether the model is seen as fantasy or reality, the observer's home life, and the situation in which he finds himself.

Stone and Hapkiewicz (1971) conducted a study to determine the effects of realistic versus imaginary aggressive models on children's interpersonal play. They predicted that aggressive behaviour depicted by a human model in a real-life setting may have greater effects than cartoon sequences in which both the models and stimulus conditions are imaginary. The results, with 180 lower elementary school children, supported their prediction that modelling effects depend upon both the degree of realism of the model's performance and the similarity between the observer's task and the model's behaviour.

Research also suggests that mass media are more likely to affect attitudes where children have no other source of information, such as direct experience of parental opinion to provide validation. Hicks (1968) reports that children who view an aggressive program with an adult who offers a variety of positive comments about the program ("Boy look at him go"...."He sure

is a tough guy") will subsequently show more aggression in a post-test situation with this adult than will other children who have seen the same programs with the same adult but have heard the adult offer negative evaluations ("He shouldn't do that"). Thus, if parents comment about the social behaviour their children are seeing on television, they may influence decisions about trying out similar behaviours.

In this first section, we have reviewed some of the experimental research relevant to the effects of TV violence on children. As the research is extensive, no attempt has been made to present all of it, but rather we have selected those articles which illustrate the main issues, as well as those articles which are most well known. As stated in the introduction, there is sufficient research evidence to suggest that televised aggression can contribute to aggressive behaviour in children. As stated by Meyer (1973) this research indicates that:

1) Children can learn violent acts through observation but will or will not tend to imitate them DEPENDING ON WHETHER THE VIOLENT ACTS ARE PERCEIVED AS REWARDING OR NOT.

2) Media content can increase the likelihood of aggressive behaviour by the viewer IF HE IS PREDISPOSED TO AGGRESSION BY FEELINGS OF ANGER TOWARD ANOTHER PERSON.

Although the laboratory studies cited in this section have greatly furthered our understanding of the relationship between TV violence and aggressive behaviour, there are those who have some concern as to whether the relationships demonstrated under controlled conditions in the laboratory setting can be generalized to natural settings. Perhaps the most conservative interpretation of these findings is that we know what type of relationships can exist between TV violence and aggression, but we cannot be completely sure of the extent to which such relationships do exist " in the complex world of free-ranging behaviour."

II SURVEY RESEARCH

Some research is available in which large groups of children have been surveyed and comparisons made of the characteristics and habits of children in communities with and without television, as well as comparisons of children who watch a lot of television with those who do not. In contrast to the studies presented in Section 1, such studies tend to be descriptive and therefore provide information about what is rather than what caused it. Although many of these surveys have not focused on violence per se, they do provide us with some information about children's television viewing habits.

The first extensive study of this kind was conducted in England during the 1950's by Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince. Two large groups of children 10-14 years were studied. One group lived in towns with television, the other group lived in towns without television. Some of their main findings are as follows:

- Children watched between 11-13 hours of TV per week; more time than they put in on any other leisure activity.
- Children watched many programs primarily designed for adults, particularly "crime thrillers".
- There was no evidence that children who watched TV were more aggressive than those who didn't.
- Those children who were heavy viewers tended to be of lower intelligence, insecure, maladjusted and have inadequate contacts and friendships.
- Bedtime was about 20 minutes later in the television homes.
- There was no evidence that TV made children more passive.

A similarly extensive American investigation of television and children was undertaken by Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961). They conducted 11 studies in the two year period from 1958-1960, one of which was similar to that of Himmelweit et al. in that they compared children in a town with television, with a comparable group of children in a town where television was not yet available. Although their work is far too extensive to report on in detail in this brief review, the following constitutes a sampling of their findings:

- Comparing pretelevision with television communities, they found that TV reorganizes leisure time and mass media use in a spectacular manner. For example, it reduces movie-going, radio-listening, magazine reading. It dominates the child's leisure.
- The average child spends on television in his first 16 years as much time as he spends on school, more time than he spends on all of the rest of the media.
- As in the Himmelweit et al study, a large part of children's viewing was of programs intended for adults.
- Children of average intelligence who are heavy viewers come to school with significantly greater vocabularies than light-viewers.
- When a child has unsatisfactory relationships with his family or peer group, he is more likely to retreat to television - but this is not a simple relationship.
- Most children, at some time or another, are frightened by a television program.
- Television in some cases makes children too passive, although the long term effects are not clear.

Their conclusion was that "although we are not trying to excuse the sins of television, whether of omission or commission, it seems to us quite a remarkable thing that if a child has security and love, interests, friendships, and healthful activities in his nontelevision hours, there is little chance that anything very bad is going to happen to him as a result of television" (p.175).

In a more recent survey, Dominick and Greenberg (1972) examined girls' attitudes toward violence as related to TV exposure, family attitudes, and social class. Their subjects were 404 grade four through six girls. The girls completed questionnaires on each of the three variables and also on four indices of aggression: a) willingness to use violence, b) use of violence in conflict situations, c) perceived effectiveness of violence, d) approval of aggression.

Although family attitudes toward aggression showed the most persistent relationship to the child's aggressive attitudes, exposure to TV violence also made a consistent independent contribution to the child's notions about violence: the greater the level of exposure, the more the child was willing to use violence, to suggest it as a solution to conflict, and to perceive it as effective. No social class differences were found.

Dominick and Greenberg (1972) replicated this study using grade four to six boys as their subjects. Their results suggested that perceived effectiveness of violence was directly affected by television exposure for both middle and lower class boys (with more exposure comes more approval of violence). The other three indices of attitudes were affected by exposure to TV for only middle class boys. However, as in the study of girls' attitudes, both family attitudes toward aggression and the social environment of the family had a persistent impact.

Edgar (1973) examined the relationship of self-esteem in Australian children to their reactions to film and television violence. Two groups, selected on the basis of "self esteem", responded to questionnaires regarding their television viewing habits and family background. They also viewed "fantasy" and realistic violence in films. Results showed that high-esteem males preferred factual shows to fantasies, whereas low-esteem males preferred fantasy shows with male protagonists. Females preferred fantasy shows with female protagonists and low-esteem females preferred them more than high. High-esteem males viewed realistic violence more objectively on the whole than did other groups.

In a survey of the TV viewing habits of grade 5 and 6 pupils at Grenoble Public School in North York (Crawford, 1972), 85% of pupils reported watching TV at lunch; 81% watch TV after school and 92% watch TV after supper. The three most popular categories of programs were Situation Comedies, Science Fiction and Detective/Police Drama.

Although the studies examined in this section were not designed to examine cause/effect relationships, they do provide us with some descriptive information regarding the impact of television on children's lives. As well, several of the attitude surveys perhaps provide additional support for Hypothesis III discussed earlier, i.e. that the effect of TV violence is dependent upon a variety of factors, including the child's personality and family environment.

III. TV PROGRAMMING

As outlined in the previous sections, there is now sufficient evidence that television can influence both children's social behaviour and attitudes. Such findings, therefore, would seem to have implications for action by the television industry with regard to TV programming. However, as mentioned earlier, Gerbner and his associates reported that the percentage of programs and hours containing violent action did not change from 1967 - 1973. According to Rubenstein (1974), this lack of change in the level of violence is not simply explained. Industry representatives offer three reasons why television content has not changed in the last few years:

(a) they feel there has not been a compelling demonstration of the relationship between TV content and viewer's behaviours

(b) they refer to the problems of serving a mass audience seven days a week under constant pressure of production deadlines

(c) they feel television content is bound by the realities of life.

Leifer, Gordon and Graves (1974) discuss these reasons in some detail, so that in this report we will only briefly highlight some of their main points.

The TV industry attempts to justify the violence in program content through criticisms of research results. Although Leifer et al feel that the criticisms of some of the earlier studies are valid, they feel more recent studies have been designed to avoid earlier pitfalls. Often the industry has tended to support the catharsis hypothesis discussed earlier in Section 1. However, as you will recall, there is in fact little research evidence to support this position. The industry is further reluctant to reduce aggressive content for fear of losing viewers. Leifer et al, believe, however, that there has been no good test of the belief that violence in programming is necessary for viewer interest. Thirdly, the industry maintains that material containing violence, conflict, crisis is easier to develop within the time frame allotted than prosocial material, e.g., behaviours such as co-operation, nurturance, altruism, self-control.

Although the industry continues to assert its need for violent content, it does have some internally established mechanisms for the control of program content. These mechanisms operate to produce noncontroversial content high in aggression and low in diversity. Some observers believe, however, that the network standards on violence are weak with primary concern for the economic impact of losing viewers rather than the psychological effects of

television violence. The networks want to attract as many viewers as possible in order to convince advertisers it is advantageous to sponsor a particular program. One way to increase audience appeal is to provide action and conflict without offending anyone.

So far we have talked primarily of the American television industry with respect to advertisers; what about Canadian advertisers, do they have a similar influence on program content? Articles in two spring '75 issues of "Marketing" were devoted to this topic. In the March 31st issue, Ontario Attorney-General John Clement was reported as saying that advertisers should use the influence of sponsorship to help curb television violence. "If advertisers begin to feel more sensitive to the nature of the shows they sponsor, perhaps the violence will be toned down". In a follow-up article, April 28th, reporting on the views of the advertiser, most felt that there was little they could do to change the situation. The following are some of their comments:

- We buy time, not program content. We're at the mercy of the networks.
- We try to place as many of our commercials as possible in nonviolent family programs
- We prefer to advertise on programs that offer good wholesome family entertainment
- If there is violence on TV it's because people want to watch it. If the audience finds it acceptable, why shouldn't we?
- We really don't have any choice
- If we want to get on TV it's difficult to differentiate between kinds of programs

It seems then, that in terms of what the television industry will do and the advertisers will do, we're at an impasse.

So far in this section, we have really discussed programming in general. There are some aspects of procedures for programming children's television which are unlike those for adult programming and should be discussed as well. The number of major sponsors for children's programs is relatively small as only a few companies offer products aimed directly at the child market. There is little economic incentive for producers of many children's shows to become informed about children. Their major source of information is the Nielson ratings and they assume if children watch the programs, something must be right. Leifer et al, however, feel this assumption is questionable since the networks offer little choice in children's programming.

Pilot programs are now an integral stage in the development of adult prime-time television series. No pilots are made for children's programs as children tend to view television during particular hours regardless of the specific programs offered. This

minimizes the chance, therefore, that a children's program will fail! You're probably thinking by now, but what about Sesame Street, The Electric Company, Misterogers - popular children's programs which have done extensive research in developing their programs. But such programs have not been produced by commercial networks, but by public television. Although Federal government support for such programs has probably increased such programming on commercial networks, there is still a long way to go!

What can we as the public - parents and educators - do to influence programming for children?

Parents have the greatest opportunity to influence their children's use of television, in several ways, e.g. by controlling viewing, by interacting with their children about what they have seen and by example. To date, there is little evidence that parents do control their children's viewing, either in terms of the amount of viewing or programs viewed. Although Lyle and Hoffman (1972) found that 70% of a group of mothers they interviewed said that they occasionally or often directed which programs their children would watch, only 20-36% of the children interviewed felt that their parents limit their viewing!

Often, children watch television either alone or with siblings. Further, there is some evidence that even when families do watch television together, there is little interaction. Parents are therefore failing to take advantage of a good opportunity to influence their children. Earlier in this report, we referred to a study by Hicks (1968) in which an adult's comments (either positive or negative) about a program had an affect on the degree of aggression exhibited by children in a post-test situation. Those children who viewed the program with an adult who made positive comments about the aggressive action, showed more aggression than those children who heard the adult making a negative evaluation of the aggressive action.

There is also evidence from the research conducted on "Sesame Street" that parents who watched that program with their child and commented on the content, could influence what their children retained. Ball and Bogatz (1970) found that children who had learned the most from "Sesame Street" had mothers who watched with them and talked about what the children had seen.

Parents, therefore, have recourse to at least two kinds of action (1) they can simply turn off the television when violent programs are being shown and/or (2) they can spend more time interacting with their children about what they watch. Turning off the television is one way of influencing the television industry. As discussed earlier, the industry maintains that viewers want to watch violent programs. However, if the ratings for such programs go down, perhaps the industry will be encouraged to consider other alternatives. Liebert in his book "The Early Window" also suggests that another source of influence to change programming is through economic sanctions imposed on advertisers. He quotes Alberta Siegal's suggestion that consumers can refuse to purchase the products of advertisers who sponsor programs with a high

degree of aggressive content.

In terms of parents providing support, Rainsberry (1975) also emphasizes the importance of parents sharing television experiences with their children. In his experience, it was often tension or anxiety, frequently used by producers as a means of sustaining a plot, "which caused the greatest damage to child viewers and not so much the detailing and cataloguing of the number of violent incidents which occurred...." A parent's presence while watching television can thus provide them with security and so serve to alleviate the tension.

Thus far, we have talked about some of the ways in which parents can play a role in monitoring their child's television experiences. What about teachers? They too can play a role similar to that of parents in terms of suggesting programs for children to view and discussing them in class. But, according to Rainsberry (1975), teachers should also consider the importance of teaching children qualities of style in the media and an understanding of mass media. According to Leifer et al, "perhaps we can teach children about the roles of television, the types of information it presents, and the cues that indicate which type of information is presented. If young children can acquire this knowledge, they might understand when and how particular content relates to their lives." Equipped with this critical awareness, the student can come to some realization of the social significance of the media.

In this paper, we have discussed only the potential negative influences of television. However, if television can increase aggressive behaviours, conceivably it can encourage other forms of interpersonal interaction, such as socially valued behaviours. Researchers are beginning to investigate these alternatives and their results so far seem encouraging. Eliminating what is harmful on TV without offering a viable and positive alternative would be only half a step at best. Therefore, perhaps our emphasis in the future should be to accentuate the positive.

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